

# Headstart

## Children teach teens to care

### Youths get Head Start at kicking drug habits

By Susan Howard  
Staff Writer

Across the street from each other, a children's day care center and a teenager's drug treatment program are both reaping the benefits of youthful friendship.

Cobb County's Head Start program provides day care to about 100 disadvantaged children. In its brightly decorated offices at 630 Hurt Drive in Marietta, children ages three through five are taught games and crafts as well as speech therapy, physical therapy and other skills.

STRAIGHT, Inc., at 2221 Austell Road, teaches chemically dependent teens another way to behave. In its stark, brightly lit assembly hall, they learn hard lessons about responsibility, about caring.

And now STRAIGHT teens are learning how to give, by caring for Head Start tots, spending about 30 hours of their spare time each week at the federally funded day-care center.

"They have a chance to grow here," said Head Start director Lyvonda Crumb. "They help us in every way by working with teachers, in the office, they do everything."

STRAIGHT'S drug rehabilitation program first removes all responsibility from drug-dependent teenagers, and then awards it back slowly, in phases.

When they are almost through the program, teens are encouraged to take on some volunteer work away from the rehabilitation center. And working at Head Start provides a perfect solution, said STRAIGHT director David Tilley.

"All of our kids at some point have missed a part of their childhood when they were using drugs," Tilley said. By working at Head Start, STRAIGHT teens "can go back to their childhood and replace some of the caring and feelings they lost."

One Head Start volunteer is Pam Cobb, who has been on the STRAIGHT program for about a year.

When she names the drugs she used 18 months ago, it sounds like a list of prescriptions from a quack physician—cocaine, FCP, THC, mescaline, hashish, "just everything," she said.

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At the Head Start center, Tinda Peace shows her pupils proper sliding form (from above right). Pam Cobb, a STRAIGHT volunteer, plays with Freddy Mitchell, left, and Shannon

Govney; and Carol Ann Raymond, a speech pathologist, reads to Michael Peace, while James Dean Lowery, a STRAIGHT volunteer, looks on. (Photos — G.A. Clark)

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But life is now very different for Pam. A popular force with many of the youngsters, she is greeted by numerous hugs and kisses whenever she goes into a classroom at the center.

Working at Head Start has given Pam another start, too. "The more I worked here, the more I started to feel as if I was really special," she said.

"I feel as if I'm really giving something to these kids. I want to give them the love and caring that I denied my parents when I was using drugs."

Dennis Fitzpatrick, now a junior staff member at STRAIGHT, said he decided to work at Head Start because of the good things he heard from people like Pam.

"I just like working with the kids," Dennis said. "This is the kind of field I would like to go into when I get out of school."

His biggest enjoyment is in working with the little boys who do not have a father figure at home.

"They apparently like it when there's a guy around to play with them and pay attention to them," he said.

The best thing the volunteers learn is how to give a part of themselves in a positive way, Pam said.

"I used drugs for eight years. I used to think the way to show I cared was to give my friends drugs," she said.

"Now I've found a place where I give my gifts and talents. Through my work with the kids I've seen better changes within myself."